



**One Hundred Ninth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515**

September 4, 2005

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

During the past week, the federal government faced the greatest test of its emergency preparedness and response capabilities. As the grim picture coming out of our Gulf states reveals, the federal government has failed to protect the American people and our nation's welfare.

Under the National Emergencies Act, codified at 50 U.S.C. 1601 *et seq*, the authority to declare a national emergency, thereby allowing the National Guard and other critical resources to be activated and alerted, lies within your office. On September 14, 2001, you used this mechanism to alert and activate more than half of the Army Guard personnel (more than 175,000) and one-third of Air Guard personnel (about 35,000) in response to the events of September 11th. The federal government also has the authority to activate, if needed, a major air support plan under pre-existing contracts with private and cargo airlines participating in the Civilian Reserve Air Fleet.

Why were these mechanisms not utilized last Sunday when it became clear that Hurricane Katrina was headed straight to our Gulf Coast, home to millions of people, and the cradle of America's oil and gas reserves? At that time, a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans, the 35<sup>th</sup> largest city in the nation, was ordered by the state. There were warnings that the hurricane would potentially cripple the Gulf's oil and gas assets that supply 35 percent of the U.S. domestic oil production. In addition, many believed the shipping and warehousing of critical chemicals, agriculture exports, and imports in at least three states would be impacted. The threat to multiple states, a large metropolitan area, and interstate economic assets required federal action.

Even if one downplayed the potential impact before the storm, we ask why in the 24 hours following Katrina's massive ground assault, neither the National Guard nor the Civil Reserve Air Fleet was activated by the federal government? The scenes from New Orleans as the

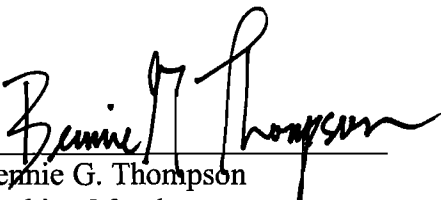
levees broke was one of utter chaos as the city became flooded under several feet of water. The picture from Mississippi was no better, as Biloxi, Gulfport, and other cities were shown flattened with reports of high casualties. Storm surges flooded downtown Mobile, Alabama.

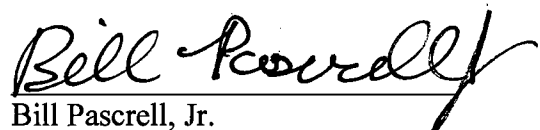
In addition, Monday saw 615 of the 819 oil platforms in the Gulf of Mexico evacuated. Oil production dropped to 1.4 million barrels a day, a 92 percent change. Natural gas production was down 83 percent. It became clear that day that the Plantation and Colonial pipelines that supplied gasoline to the entire Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic region were rendered inoperable because of power outages. There were indications that airports across the nation might run out of jet fuel and that some airports will be forced to close down. The security of our nation's energy sector is critical to national security and is an essential responsibility of the federal government. As gas prices rose and shortages were reported across the nation, America was facing a national crisis in need of leadership.

The federal government was not prepared to respond properly to last week's catastrophe. The question remains why, despite the warnings and potential for loss of life and economic damage across the nation, you did not declare a national emergency either immediately before or after Hurricane Katrina struck? In addition, if our nation's vulnerabilities and ill-preparedness is so transparent when a hurricane strikes, what does that say about our ability to counter a terrorist attack, for which we will have no warning?

In our role as Ranking Members of the House Homeland Security Committee and its Emergency Preparedness Subcommittee, we request answers to these questions.

Sincerely,

  
Bernie G. Thompson  
Ranking Member

  
Bill Pascrell, Jr.  
Ranking Member,  
Subcommittee on Emergency  
Preparedness, Science, and  
Technology

cc: Michael Chertoff, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security  
Michael Brown, Director, Federal Emergency Management Agency